

REMARKS
CHARGE D'AFFAIRES SUSAN FALATKO
SIGNING CEREMONY, AMBASSADOR'S FUND FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION
ENTRANCE OF AAPRAVASI GHAT TRUST FUND, QUAY 1 STREET, PORT LOUIS
SEPTEMBER 11, 2014

Honorable Minister of Arts and Culture, Mr. Mukeshwar Choonee;
Mr. Jeewan Mohit, Director of the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund; Staff of the Trust Fund; Distinguished guests; Good afternoon.

It is an honor to be with you here at the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Site, to support the next step in conserving Mauritius' important place in the history of global diaspora. Our special thanks to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund for hosting us in this fascinating monument.

The walls of this building witnessed – person by person - the foundation of the vibrant multi-cultural society that exists in Mauritius today. Aapravasi Ghat reminds us that the thriving country around us was built on the incredible journeys and hard work of generations who came before us. It is our duty to remember those generations, and to keep their stories alive by preventing such treasures from collapsing and disappearing.

The United States Congress established the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation for just this purpose. Since its foundation in 2001, the fund has supported the preservation of cultural sites and objects in over 125 developing countries. It is a testament the respect the American people have for diverse cultural history around the world.

Today, I am pleased to announce that from a highly competitive field of 134 applications, Mauritius will join 33 other nations, from Azerbaijan to Jamaica, as a recipient of this year's Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. My congratulations to the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, who will receive over 600,000 Mauritian rupees for their proposal to document and conserve the mid-19th century quarantine station on Flat Island. The Fund has put together a great team to carry out the project including Dr. Diego Calaon from Italy and Mauritius' own Dr. Krish Seetah, an Associate Professor at Stanford University in California.

This project has particular resonance for the United States as it will help to better document the global phenomenon of indentured labor in the 19th century – a history that our countries share. Like Mauritius, the United States is a country of immigrants. Many of our ancestors arrived on the shores of North America fleeing war or persecution, seeking a better future, as poor laborers, and in our darkest chapter, as slaves. Like you, we recognize the importance of this multi-national legacy to our national identity and culture. Ellis Island in New York Harbor is our own well-known immigration depot that was the first stop for more than 12 million new Americans in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today, it is preserved as a museum and archive visited by over 3 million people each year – now as tourists and families researching their ancestors' voyages to the United States.

It is not as widely known, but another small island in New York Harbor, Bedloe's Island, was used as a quarantine station for immigrants to America for many years before Ellis Island. Today, that island is known as Liberty

Island, the home of the Statue of Liberty – a renowned symbol of freedom, but also a reminder of the hope and suffering of immigrants the entire world over.

The stone buildings and structures of the quarantine station on Flat Island are closely linked to the building we now stand in and, like those on Ellis and Liberty Islands in the United States, we hope they will reveal yet another chapter in the lives of those immigrants who passed through here. These remnants of the past will help us understand and celebrate how Mauritian society, and immigrant societies around the world, organized itself to survive, with genius and courage, into the present.

Once again, let me congratulate the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund and all Mauritians for preserving and transmitting their cultural heritage to future generations. This is the fourth time a project from Mauritius has benefited from the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. In addition to prior archaeological projects, the United States has assisted in both oral history preservation and in safeguarding traditional building techniques here. This dedication to the protection of cultural heritage is an expression of the values of a country, and clearly it is a value our two nations share.

Ambassador Villarosa and I certainly look forward to visiting the project on Flat Island in the near future, and working with the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund in the next year on this project.

Thank you and congratulations.